

# Welcome to the Iowa Utilities Board's 2021 Fall Meetings







# HOUSEKEEPING

- Name, company, years of experience in the industry in the chat
- Please mute yourself
- How to raise your hand
- Asking questions
  - chat questions to everyone
  - presenters will pause for questions at intervals throughout the presentation
- Knowledge checks and scenarios will appear throughout the presentation





# AGENDA

- IUB Regulation and Oversight
- Administrative Rules Updates: Chapter 27
- Disconnections and Payment Agreements
- LIHEAP/LIHWAP
- Moratorium
- Telecommunications
- Other Programs

**Meeting attendees will receive a copy of the presentation and informational items following the presentation**

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# Meet our Customer Service Team




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# OFFICE OF CONSUMER ADVOCATE

Division of the Iowa Attorney General's Office

- 
- Receives and reviews all IUB filings and complaints
  - Represents the overall interest of the consumer (not individual customers)
  - Technical staff and attorneys review and file responses on many issues before the Board



# At a Glance: The Board's Regulatory Oversight

Iowa Code §§ 474.9 and 476.1

Customer Service Rules:  
199 IAC Chapters 19, 20  
and 27

Iowa Code

Board Rules

Utility  
Tariffs

Utility  
Policies



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# REGULATORY AUTHORITY

- Electric and Gas Service
  - Investor-owned utilities - rates, services, all areas
    - MidAmerican Energy, Alliant Energy, Liberty Utilities, Black Hills Energy
  - Municipal and Rural Electric Cooperatives
    - Iowa Admin. Code Chapter 27
    - IUB Customer Service focus: disconnections
- Water
  - Investor-owned utilities with more than 2,000 customers
  - Iowa American Water
- Telecommunications
  - two-way landline communication
  - IUB Customer Service focus: quality of service, slamming and cramming







# LIMITED OR NO REGULATORY OVERSIGHT

## No Jurisdiction

- Cellular service
- Municipal water
- Internet
- Cable Television
- Rates and charges for telephone service

## Referrals to Other Agencies

- Office of the Ombudsman
  - local government and municipal utility inquiries
- Attorney General's Office
  - Price gouging
  - Internet and cable business practices







# REGULATORY OVERSIGHT

Issue	Investor-Owned Utilities	Municipal Utilities	Rural Electric Cooperatives
New Customer	Board	Municipal	REC
Budget Billing	Board	Municipal	REC
Deposits	Board	Municipal	REC
Late Payment Fee	Board	Municipal	REC
Disconnection & Safety	Board	Board	Board
Reconnection	Board	Municipal	REC







# IUB COMPLAINT TYPES

- Verbal Inquiries - 7 days
  - Received via phone
  - Disconnections, customer cannot get a hold of the utility after repeated attempts
  - 24 - 48 hour response time
- General Inquiries (GIs) - 30 days
  - Written inquiries that require additional information from utility
  - No clear rules violation, or limited IUB oversight
  - 10 day response time for utility, conducted over email with customer included
- Informal Complaints (C-files) - 90 days
  - Complex complaints with possible rules violations or clarification needed
  - 20 day response time for utility, may require additional information
  - Staff issues Proposed Resolution (PR), complaint closes 14 days after PR issued
  - Potential for C-file to result in a formal complaint (FCU)
- Referrals on no oversight issues -- forward to utility from [customer@iub.iowa.gov](mailto:customer@iub.iowa.gov)
  - Misdirected emails, no oversight
  - No response required to IUB







# Knowledge Check #1

Which one of the following services does the IUB have the least regulation over?

- A. Municipal Water
- B. Municipal Gas Disconnections
- C. Investor-Owned Electric
- D. Landline Telecommunications







# ADMINISTRATIVE RULES UPDATES - CHAPTER 27

- IAC Ch 27 applies to electric municipal utilities and rural electric cooperatives (REC)
  - Set out the specific statutory provisions over which the Board has jurisdiction under Iowa Code §§ 476.1A and 476.1B
  - Effective September 29, 2021
  - Replaced IAC 20 for electric municipal utilities and electric cooperatives
  - Investor-owned utilities will continue to follow the rules as outlined in IAC Ch 19 and Ch 20
- Customer service electric service rules remain the same
  - Disconnection and payment agreements
  - Determine that a municipal or REC may not charge interest on a payment agreement
  - Annual bill insert requirements



# ADMINISTRATIVE RULES UPDATES - CHAPTER 27

- The IUB does not have jurisdiction over municipal electric and gas:
  - Denial of service
  - Deposits
  - Reconnection process (as long as disconnection rules were followed)
  - Disconnection or door posting fees
- Municipal Gas Utilities
  - Current rules in IAC Ch 19 still apply to municipal gas utilities





# DISCONNECTION TIMELINE

Day 1	Day 20	Day 21	12 Days After Disconnect Notice Sent to Customer
Bill issued	Bill due	12-day disconnection notice issued	<p>If no payment agreement or payment, utility may take disconnection action as soon as date included in the 12-day disconnection notice.</p> <p>Utility can disconnect with only one day's notice. During Moratorium, utility must do a door posting prior to disconnection.</p> <p>Utility must try to reach customer via phone prior to disconnection.</p>

## At a Glance:

# Disconnection Options for a Utility

Customer	Utility	Customer Options
Unpaid past-due bill	Utility mails a 12-day disconnection notice and posts if no payment received (posting is required only during winter moratorium)	Utility must offer 12-month payment agreement ( <b>Option to dispute reasonableness</b> )
No payment on first payment agreement	Can proceed with disconnection	No requirement to offer another payment agreement.
2 Consecutive Payments	Offer a second payment agreement	Eligible for new 12-month payment agreement and may be required to pay 1/12 down.
Previous payment agreement paid; customer has a new past-due bill	Utility mails a 12-day disconnection notice and posts if no payment received (posting is required only during winter moratorium)	Utility must offer a new 12-month payment agreement.





# CUSTOMER RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- Provided with every disconnection notice
- Does not replace the requirement for offering a payment agreement
- IAC Ch 20 is currently being updated to reflect the IAC Ch 27 update
  - Contact information for the community action agencies
- Copy can be found on the IUB's website
  - [Natural Gas](#)
  - [Electric](#)





## Knowledge Check #2

An electric service customer owes \$800.00. The utility has offered them a 12-month payment arrangement. The customer makes one payment and then defaults on the agreement.

**Is the utility required to offer another payment agreement?**







# MORATORIUM

- Disconnection of a residential customer shall not take place from November 1 to April 1 if that customer is:
  - A head of household and
  - Approved for either the low-income home energy assistance program (LIHEAP) or weatherization assistance program
- If a residential customer informs the utility that they plan to apply for LIHEAP after Nov 1st, the utility may not disconnect for 30 days.



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# LIHEAP (LOW INCOME HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM) & WEATHERIZATION

- Federally funded program that offers a one time payment towards a household's heating costs
- Partial payment assistance
- Applications accepted starting Oct 1st (60 years or older) or Nov 1st (all).
- Emergency heating funding available
  - Danger of disconnection
  - Low fuel levels
- Emergency cooling assistance available
- Weatherization program designed to assist with reducing heating and cooling costs in the home

## \* INCOME MAXIMUMS

<i>Household</i>	<i>Annual</i>
<u>Size</u>	<u>Gross Income</u>
1	\$25,760
2	\$34,840
3	\$43,920
4	\$53,000
5	\$62,080
6	\$71,160
7	\$80,240
8	\$89,320

For households with more than eight members,  
add \$9,080 for each additional member.



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## Knowledge Check #3

A customer calls their utility on October 15th, concerned because they received a disconnection notice for October 28th. They informed the utility they have applied for LIHEAP funding. Assuming the utility has followed all disconnection procedures, **can they disconnect?**



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# LIHWAP (LOW INCOME HOUSEHOLD WATER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM)

- Federally funded program that offers water crisis funding as part of the existing LIHEAP energy assistance program
- Must be pending disconnection or disconnected
- No direct payments to customers, all go through vendor
- Apply and issue through local community action agency
- Payments cannot be made towards:  
repair/replacement of water systems/equipment, improvement or purchase of land/buildings, deposits, or energy usage for non-water charges

## \* INCOME MAXIMUMS

<i>Household</i>	<i>Annual</i>
<u>Size</u>	<u>Gross Income</u>
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6	\$71,160
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8	\$89,320

For households with more than eight members,  
add \$9,080 for each additional member.







# DISCONNECTION - MEDICAL

- *The Utility Must*
  - Allow postponement of disconnection for 30 days if the disconnection would present a serious danger to the health of any permanent resident of the premises
  - Reconnect service if service was terminated within 14 days of disconnection, prior to verification of illness
- *The Customer Must*
  - Request medical stay
  - Offer contact information of medical professional to the utility for verification
- *The Utility Can*
  - Ask for written verification of the danger from a medical professional
  - Offer a payment agreement to the customer during the medical stay
  - Disconnect service if the customer does not fulfill the terms of that payment agreement (after 30-day medical stay)







# Knowledge Check #4

Henry and Alice live together. Henry and Alice both need oxygen for their health needs. Last fall, Alice applied for a medical stay of disconnection for herself, which was granted. This spring, Henry applied for a medical stay of disconnection for that same past due balance.

Is Henry allowed to apply for a medical stay of disconnection?





# DISCONNECTION - "ROOMMATE RULE"

- *The Utility Must*
  - Allow service for creditworthy customers and not deny service according to reasons listed in 199 IAC 20.4(16) Insufficient Reasons for Denying Service
- *The Utility May*
  - Allow a back balance to be assessed to a resident if the customer moved in at the same time as the customer of record (unless that person is a minor)
  - Allow a back balance to be assessed to a resident if they engage in name-switching (the practice of moving an account holder's name from one resident to another to intentionally avoid being held responsible for paying for service)
- *The Customer May Not*
  - Intentionally place service into someone else's name - the utility can assess a back balance to an individual who does this







# Knowledge Check #5

Mike moved in with Sarah last year. Sarah is the customer of record for electric service. This year, Sarah moved out. The electric account has a back balance of \$1,500.00.

Can the utility hold Mike responsible for the back balance?





# TELECOMMUNICATIONS

- Oversight limited to quality of service issues for landlines
- Down line complaints
  - coordination between electric providers and telecom providers
- What to expect from the IUB:
  - Staff discusses the complaint, the IUB's oversight, and other service options with customer
  - If IUB has oversight, Staff contacts telecom provider and asks for response within designated timeframe
  - When a resolution is provided, Staff responds to customer with the resolution and closes the inquiry







## OTHER PROGRAMS

- [Iowa Rent and Utility Assistance Program](#)
- [Safe at Home](#)
- [Relay Iowa](#)
- [Telecommunications Access Iowa](#)
- [Lifeline Telephone Assistance Program](#)
- [Emergency Broadband Benefit \(EPP\) Program](#)



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# Questions?

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